

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Mid-Rivers Telephone Fiber Optic Easement River Crossings
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer/Fall 2018
Proponent:	Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative, Inc.
Location:	Section 5, Township 3 North, Range 34 East (Big Horn County – Bighorn River) Sections 35 & 36, Township 5 North, Range 33 East (Yellowstone County – Yellowstone River) Section 33, Township 5 North, Range 34 East (Yellowstone & Treasure Counties – Bighorn River) *All parcels are Public Land Trust*
County:	Big Horn, Treasure and Yellowstone Counties

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative is applying for 16' wide easements on two crossings of the Bighorn River and one under the Yellowstone River located in Big Horn, Treasure and Yellowstone Counties for the installation of underground fiber optic cable as described below:

- Section 5-T3N-R34E: The proposed ± 0.27 -acre easement is located under ± 724.64 feet of the Bighorn River, immediately north (downstream) of the private Rosehip Lane bridge. The new 2-inch fiber optic bore would be located ± 15 feet below the Bighorn River bed. (No bridge easement)
- Sections 35& 36-T5N-R33E: The ± 0.36 -acre easement is located under ± 989.31 feet of the Yellowstone River, immediately west (upstream) of the Montana Highway 310 bridge. The new 2-inch fiber optic bore would be located ± 20 feet below the Yellowstone River bed. (No bridge easement)
- Section 33-T5N-R34E: The ± 0.43 -acre easement is located under $\pm 1,116.37$ feet of the Bighorn River, immediately west (upstream) of the Montana Highway 311 bridge. The new 2-inch fiber optic bore would be located ± 12 feet below the Bighorn River bed. (No bridge easement)

The easements that have been applied for are a part of a larger project where Mid-Rivers is replacing the existing copper lines with fiber optic cables in the Custer Telephone Exchange. All three of the proposed easements are borings under the beds of the Bighorn and Yellowstone Rivers. The borings will be 2-inches in diameter to accommodate the fiber optic cable.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project and there are no lessees impacted.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Yellowstone Conservation District: 310 Permit (Approved)
Treasure County Conservation District: 310 Permit (Approved)
Big Horn Conservation District: 310 Permit (Approved)
DEQ Storm Water Discharge Permit (Issued)
DEQ 401 Water Quality Certification (Approved)
US Army Corps of Engineers: Nationwide Permit (Issued)

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Issue 16' wide easements to Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative for the bored underground installation of fiber optic cable on the two crossings of the Bighorn River and one crossing of the Yellowstone River.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request by Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative to issue 16' wide easements for the bored underground installation of fiber optic cable on the two crossings of the Bighorn River and one crossing of the Yellowstone River.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i> |
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4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The proposed alternative would permit the boring of fiber optic cable at three different locations under the navigable bed of the Bighorn and Yellowstone Rivers. The cables generally are located along existing roads and all three of these proposed borings are near existing bridges and the exit and entry points are not located on Trust land. Any impacts to state-owned land would be from the boring of the new pipeline route under the riverbed. No significant adverse impacts are expected to geology and soil quality by implementing the proposed alternative.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The proposed alternative would allow for two new borings under the Bighorn River and one boring under the Yellowstone River for new fiber optic cable crossings. Short term impacts from the construction/drilling operation are not expected to have significant adverse impacts. Mid-Rivers will be required to follow Montana Best Management Practices (BMP) for stormwater runoff, as well as permitting requirements from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. This would include installing erosion control and sediment control devices to prevent topsoil from reaching the river. No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are anticipated by implementing the proposed action.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

There may be short-term isolated impacts from the equipment exhaust that is used to bore the fiber optic cables. No significant adverse impacts to air quality are expected by implementing the proposed action.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The proposed alternative would result in three new borings between 15' to 20' under the under the existing riverbeds of the Yellowstone and Bighorn Rivers. The proposed action would not result in any vegetation disturbance on state-owned land. No significant impacts to vegetation cover, quantity or quality are expected by implementing the proposed alternative.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors, songbirds, and grouse may traverse the subject sections. The proposed project activities could temporarily disrupt wildlife movement and patterns. Due to the relatively short project duration and nature no significant adverse impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated the following:

Section 5-T3N-R34E: Four animal species of concern were identified and they include: Bald Eagle, Great Blue Heron, Spiny Softshell turtle and Sauger.

Sections 35 & 36-T5N-R33E: There were nine species of concern identified in the area of the proposed easement and they include: Hoary Bat, Little Brown Myotis, Spotted Bat, Bald Eagle, Burrowing Owl, Great Blue Heron, Greater Sage Grouse, Spiny Softshell turtle and Sauger. This easement is located within Greater Sage Grouse General Habitat and the proponent has received a consultation letter from the Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation program for the extent of their entire project.

Section 33-T5N-R34E: There were eight species of concern identified in the area of the proposed easement and they include: Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Hoary Bat, Little Brown Myotis, Bald Eagle, Burrowing Owl, Great Blue Heron, Spiny Softshell turtle and Sauger. This easement is located within Greater Sage Grouse General Habitat and the proponent has received a consultation letter from the Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation program for the extent of their entire project.

Due to the nature of the proposed action, the boring of fiber optic cable under the Bighorn and Yellowstone Rivers, it is not expected that this action will have any significant long-term effect on any of the species identified on or around these three easement areas. The surface disturbance will be temporary and located on the shore areas outside of the state ownership. In addition, the proponent will need to comply with the mitigations recommended by the Sage Grouse Program. The only impacts to state-owned land will be under the bed of the navigable rivers.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. Because the area of potential effect on state land is restricted to the bed of the existing river, it is unlikely that intact cultural remains are within the state-owned portion of the APE. Because of this, no additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

A site visit was conducted on 21 May 2018 by SLO Area Planner Jeff Bollman with visual inspections of the boring area entry and exit points and river crossing locations. No cultural resources were noted. No significant adverse impact to historic or archaeological sites is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Implementation of the Proposed Alternative would cause minor temporary short-term impacts to aesthetics during the construction and boring process due to visual impacts and noise from the drill rig and other heavy equipment. The proposed action would add to the existing noise levels, but this temporary addition is not expected to cause a significant adverse impact. Once the easement areas are rehabbed from the disturbance due to the installation, the only indication that there is an underground fiber optic line would be from any above-ground warning markers. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to aesthetics is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no other known studies or future government actions planned for these three river crossings.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i>

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The location of the easements does not traverse any crop lands or commercial or industrial properties. No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed action will have no significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The proposed action will have no adverse impact on tax revenue.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

The implementation of the proposed alternative will not generate any additional demands on governmental services.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The Bighorn River is a blue-ribbon trout fishery and the two proposed borings under it are not expected to impact its recreational use. There is a potential that Mid-Rivers may need to temporarily close the reach of river they are boring under and if not, the equipment used in the boring may cause some temporary disturbance. The boring in Section 33, T5N, R34E is also adjacent to the Manuel Lisa Fishing Access site, however the boat ramp and main parking lot for the FAS is located further upstream from the proposed bore site. These impacts will be of a relatively short nature and once the borings are complete, there will be no impact to the recreational use of the Bighorn River.

The boring of the Yellowstone River, north of Custer, is approximately three miles upstream of the Manuel Lisa Fishing Access Site. There may also be some fishing from the shore at the Highway bridge. Again, the main disturbance to recreation would be a potential temporary closure and the noise from the equipment used in the boring. These impacts will be short-term and will not have a long-term adverse impact to recreational use or access to the Yellowstone River.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

No significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed alternative will not have a significant adverse impact on cultural uniqueness or diversity.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The State benefited by getting a total one-time fee of \$410 from Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative for the purchase of these three easements. The Public Land Trust will be the beneficiary of this payment.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jeff Bollman, AICP	Date: 27 June 2018
	Title: Area Planner, Southern Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that permanent 16' easements be granted to Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative for the purpose of boring fiber optic cable under the Bighorn and Yellowstone Rivers at the following locations:

- SW¼SE¼ and SE¼SE¼ of Section 5, Township 3 North, Range 34 East (Big Horn County – Bighorn River) containing ±0.27-acres.
- SE¼NE¼ of Section 35 and the SW¼NW¼ of Section 36, Township 5 North, Range 33 East (Yellowstone County – Yellowstone River) containing ±0.36-acres.
- NE¼NE¼ of Section 33, Township 5 North, Range 34 East (Yellowstone & Treasure Counties – Bighorn River) containing ±0.43-acres.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action which would entail the boring of fiber optic cable at three different locations under the navigable bed of the Bighorn and Yellowstone Rivers. The cables generally are located along existing roads and all three of these proposed borings are near existing bridges and the exit and entry points are not located on Trust land. Any impacts to state-owned land would be from the boring of the new pipeline route under the riverbed. There are no natural features that could produce adverse impacts or species of concern occupying the parcels that are expected to be impacted by implementing the proposed action.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:☐

EIS

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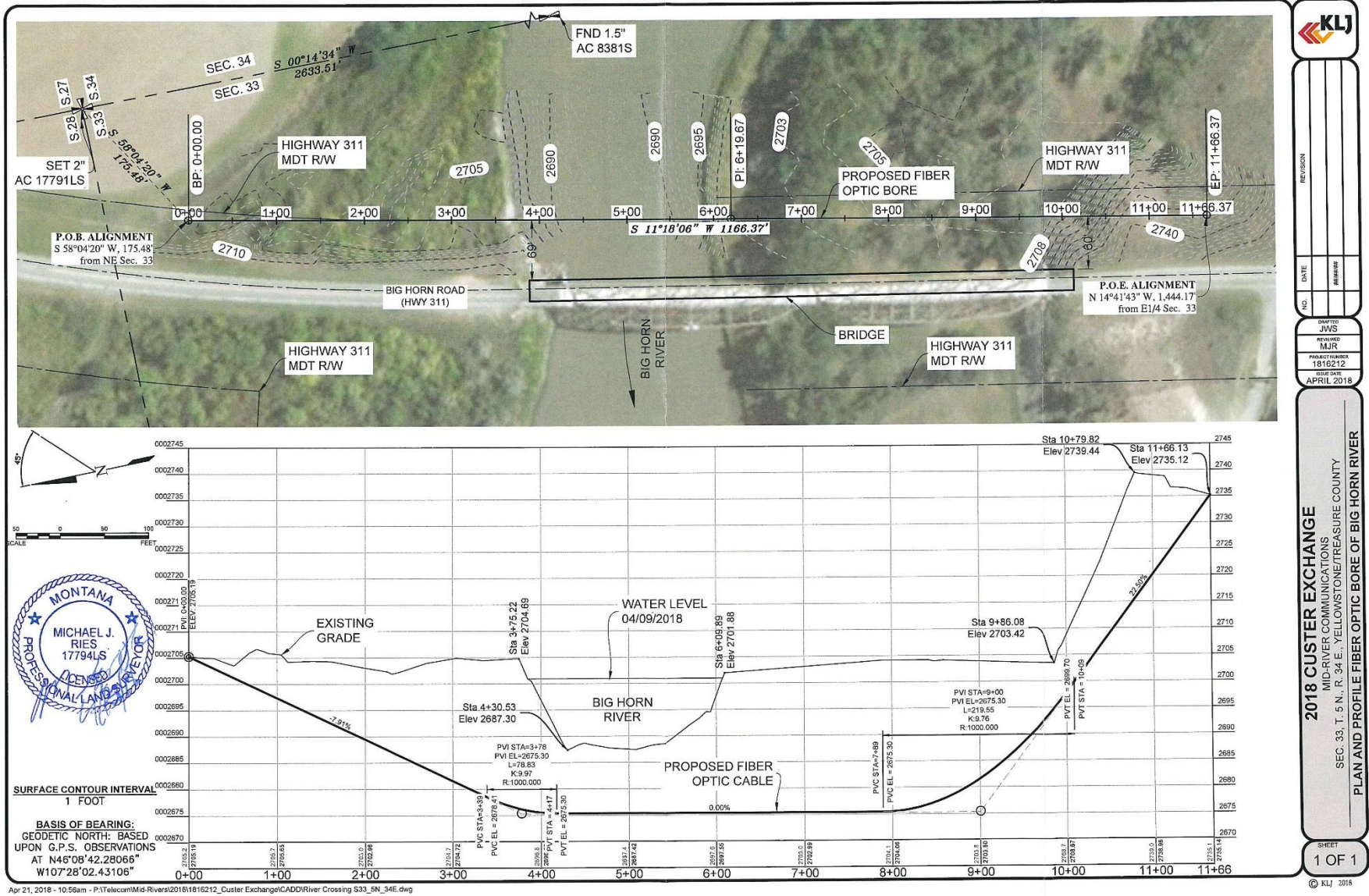
More Detailed EA

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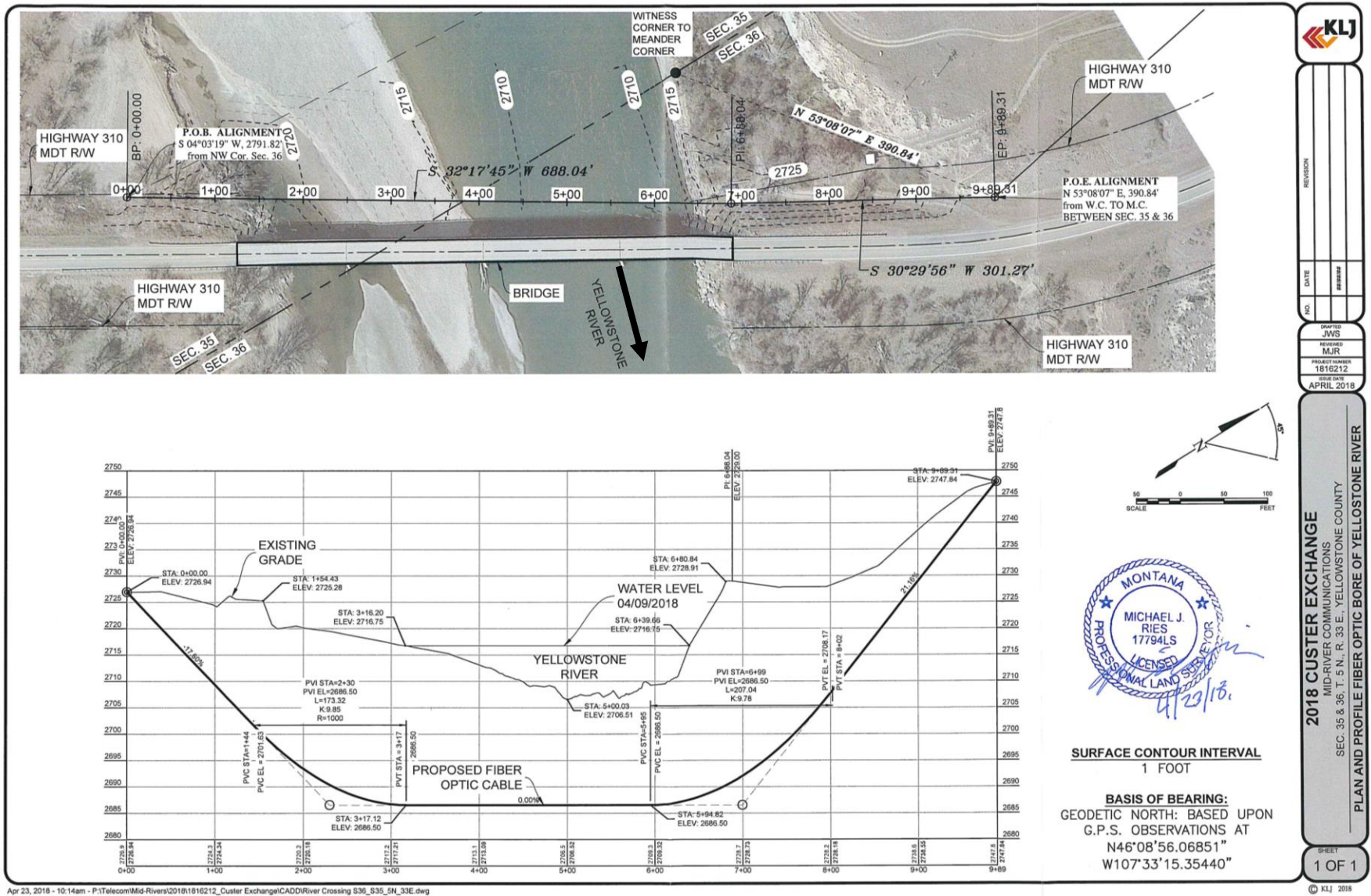
No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Matthew Wolcott
	Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office
Signature:	
Date:	

Attachment A – Plan & Profile of Proposed Bighorn River Crossing in Section 11, T5N, R33E

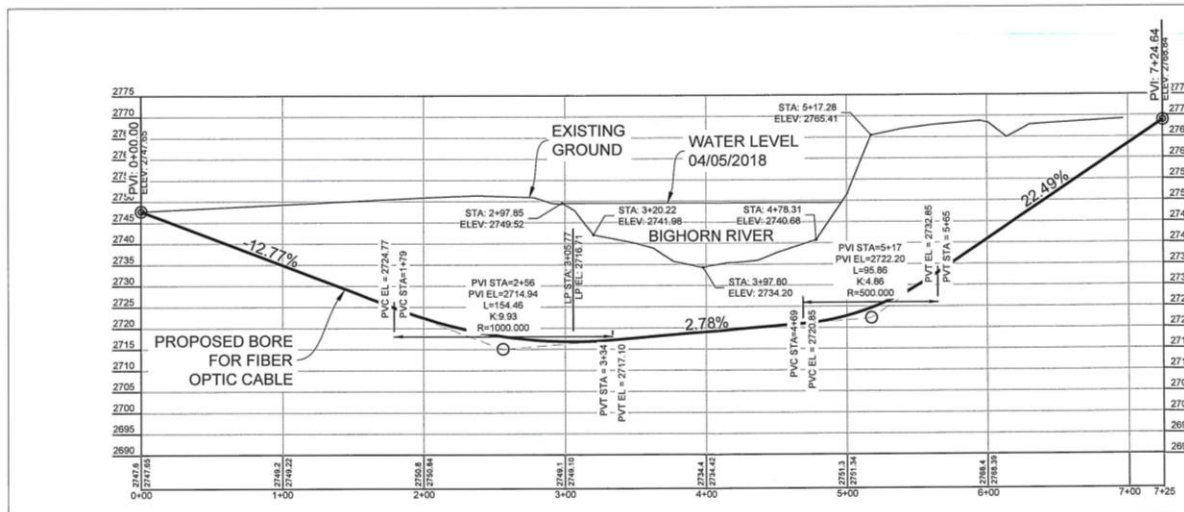
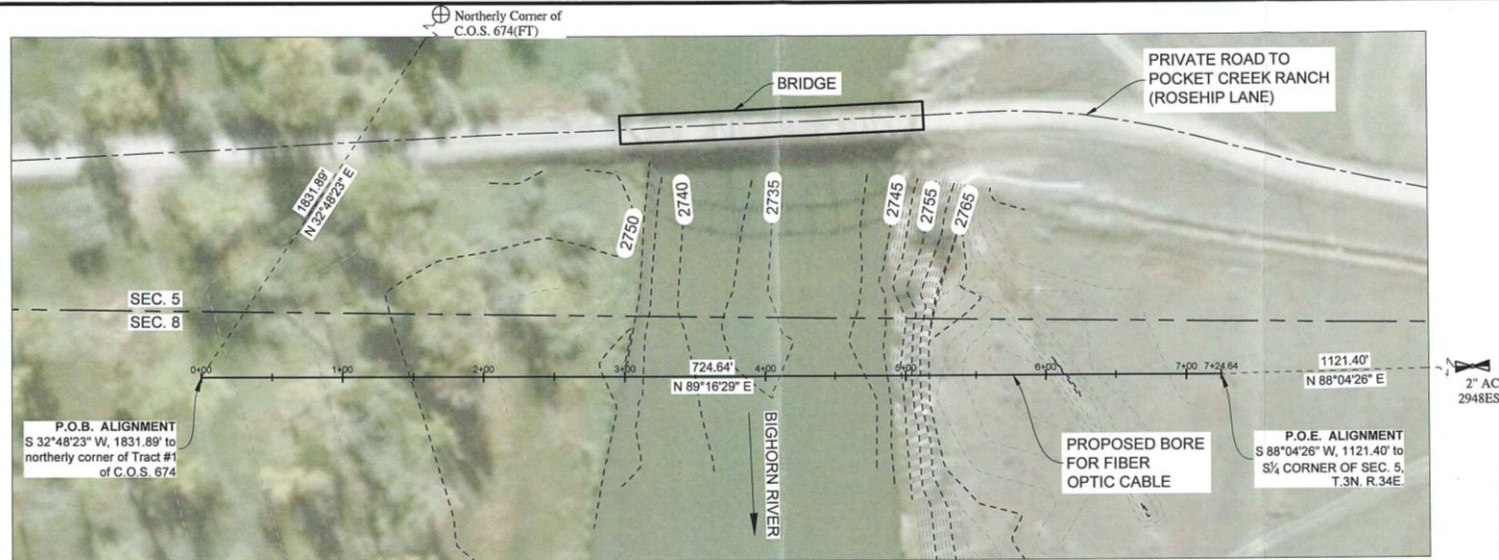


Attachment B – Plan & Profile of Proposed Yellowstone River Crossing in Sections 35 & 36, T5N, R33E



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Attachment C – Plan & Profile of Proposed Bighorn River Crossing in Section 5, T3N, R34E



SCALE 0 40 80 FEET



SURFACE CONTOUR INTERVAL
1 FOOT

BASIS OF BEARING:
GEODETIC NORTH: BASED UPON
G.P.S. OBSERVATIONS AT
N46°01'44.52161"
W107°31'06.70642"

KLJ

DATE	1816212
NO.	1816212
DATE	APRIL 2018

2018 CUSTER EXCHANGE
MID-RIVER COMMUNICATIONS
SEC. 5, T. 3 N., R. 34 E., BIGHORN COUNTY
PLAN AND PROFILE FIBER OPTIC BORE OF BIGHORN RIVER

SHEET
1 OF 1

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